

The principles of self-assessment and self-evaluation and the important role they play in students developing as effective learners, and educational professionals will be explored throughout using a series of journal entries. These entries reflect on personal experiences of my learning journey in higher education over the last three years. The significant role feedback has had both on self-assessment and evaluation will also be reflected on. Experiences of teaching, learning and assessments will be included to help identify personal developments that have been made. Reflection for Burns and Sinfield (2012) allows autonomy over own learning as it actively promotes self-assessment. To become effective learners self-assessment and self-evaluation are paramount. For Cottrell (2013) effective learners are independent, motivated, organised, can manage time and study efficiently and are actively involved throughout their learning journey. Moreover, they are reflective. Reflecting on personal experiences and learning as a student allows an opportunity to assess and evaluate the developmental path to becoming an effective learner.

Students can only develop as effective learners when they fully engage in self-assessment and evaluation. The ability to self-assess and self-evaluate requires an ability to think critically about both positive and negative aspects of experiences. According to Boud 1986 (cited in Smale and Fowlie, 2015, p. 169) when students self-assess they become responsible for their learning by monitoring and judging their work. The importance of personally evaluating ones work is that it can significantly impact on final grades. Cottrell (2013) suggests that self-evaluation enables students to keep track of progress, recognise strengths and address any weaknesses. As self-assessment and self-evaluation are such essential components to becoming an effective learner, it stands to reason that learners must genuinely grasp their meaning and the significance they will play in their higher education journey.

Self-assessment and the role it plays in developing effective learners

While Assessment measures achievement, ideally it should also be for learning (William, 2012). Through self-assessment students can be active in

the process of assessment, in regularly assessing, students can become effective learners as they can monitor understanding, progress and how to close the gap to reach their goals. Self-assessment is considered an essential feature throughout education from primary school to higher education and even in the workplace. Therefore, the importance of understanding and engaging in the process early on is evident to see (Smale and Fowlie, 2015). In higher education self-assessment has been used in my learning journey throughout formative assessments in seminars, but most notably through the process of writing assignments. For example, assessing whether I have met the success criteria, assessing work before submission and identifying strengths of my work and how it could be improved. Self-assessment has allowed me to reflect, be self-critical and be realistic in personal expectations. Moreover consecutive assignments have benefited from frequently engaging in the process. Ultimately for Boud (1995) self-assessment is vital to all individuals as it not only supports learning but also develops long-term skills, which can be transferred to the workplace and lifelong learning.

Self-evaluation and the role it plays in developing effective learners

Self-evaluation is viewed more like a formal assessment although often interlinks with self-assessment, leading to confusion and difficulty in deciphering them apart. Similar to self-assessment, self-evaluation allows students to reflect critically, consider progress and developments and next steps. Self-evaluation is a way of reviewing ones work after completion, so in higher education, this is evident in evaluating an assignment before submission where students consider their strengths and weakness of assignments, so in this sense, it is used as a way of rating progress (Cano and Ion, 2017). In addition to self-assessing my work, self-evaluation has allowed critical reflection at the end of what has often been quite a stressful process to evaluate what worked well, what needs more work and to consider next steps to improve the experience and outcome next time. Today self-evaluation like self-assessment is more prevalent in all educational establishments right through into the workplace, and is significant to lifelong learning, in that ones learning journey continues throughout the lifespan and

so then to should self-evaluation (Armitage, et al, 2012). To this end, all students should be encouraged and supported in developing the necessary transferable skill of self-evaluation to become effective learners.

Effective learners are evident in their ability to be self-regulated. Moreover, they use self-assessment and self-evaluation throughout their learning. According to Ariani (2016), self-regulated students can take control over their thoughts, behaviours and emotions and so manage their learning. For example, students set goals and complete tasks, assessing effectiveness throughout, look for solutions, reflect and think about what and how they could do better next time. Linked to self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation the significance of self-regulation is not to be overlooked (Rakes and Dunn, 2010 cited in Ariani, 2016, p. 159). Indeed, Zimmerman (1986 cited in Ariani, 2016 p. 157), highlights a correlation between a student's inability to self-regulate and poor academic performance. Moreover, for Zumbrunn et al (2001 cited in Ariani, 2016) developing self-regulation is no easy feat for learners who lack academic motivation.

Self-evaluation during year one

The first few months of university life was a steep learning curve both academically and personally. Entering as a mature student initially proved to be a big culture shock. Although intrinsically motivated from the beginning self-efficacy began to deplete to the point of threatening continuation on the course due mostly to intense feelings of isolation. According to Smale and Fowlie (2015) due to the varying experiences of students before entry into higher education, the majority of students will experience similar emotions although to varying degrees. While McIlroy (2003) suggests that family and work responsibilities are more prevalent, he also argues that feelings of isolation are not unique to mature students. Indeed, younger students often feel this way, especially when living away from home. Fortunately, these emotions were experienced only short-term due to support from family and lecturers. Moreover, constructive, encouraging feedback early on supported and developed self-confidence and self-efficacy regarding class contributions

and assignments. Following personal and academic self-evaluation I developed self-determination to pursue a personal goal of achieving a degree in Education Studies. Gardner (2012, p.173) suggests that a high level of self-determination is linked to a strong intrinsic motivation whereas low levels are linked to an absence of motivation.

Peer assessment

An assignment in year one required all students to produce an academic poster. Before they were collected in to be marked by the lecturer, we peer assessed our work. Posters were displayed around the class, and all students were to review a variety and provide written feedback. While anonymity was maintained throughout the process an overwhelming feeling of dread presented at the prospect of work that had been completed to the best of one's ability being potentially be criticised by peers. Needless to say, although interested to view peers work it was difficult to detach from one's own efforts and so maintained a watchful eye on any potential visitors to my work, listening to any comments. For Tefula (2014), to be meaningful, feedback should be sought from those deemed to be knowledgeable and whose opinions are valued. However, comments left while not all complementary did offer different perspectives and allowed an opportunity to personal evaluate ones efforts. On reflection this form of formative assessment helped with personal knowledge and understanding and consideration of my own strengths and weaknesses and so helped develop critical thinking skills as suggested by Eales-Reynolds et al (2013). Furthermore, interaction and feedback between students were on the whole positive, and so the experience provided a platform for discussions about the assignment and universal strengths and weaknesses.

According to Davis (1999 cited in Smale and Fowlie, 2015, p. 69) when providing assessment feedback to peers students need to be specific, descriptive, concise and objective for comments to be fully effective. The aim in this sense is not to judge or criticise but instead to provide constructive feedback that can inform and support learners and not undermine or

demoralise efforts. Ineffective or excessive negative feedback can be destructive and leave learner's fireclay protective of their work and reluctant to share in the future. Moreover, Tefula (2014) argues that where students disagree with a comment, it is important that they do not act on it altering approach or design.

Group work and feedback

In year two, all students were given a reading about attachment, asked to highlight relevant information and make notes. It was made clear the reading would be referred to, discussed and working in groups feedback would be expected during the next seminar. The facilitated task was made more effective as the lecturer asked open-ended questions randomly and allowed sufficient response time. Moreover, group work and discussions provided an opportunity for both lecturer and students to contribute, deepening understanding and engagement. For Wiliam (2012) the achievement gap becomes more prominent when the same students are always allowed to answer questions with some students engaging while others switch off. On a personal level engaging in prior reading allowed a more in depth understanding to be formed and to make useful contributions to group and class discussions and questions. Moreover, a clear link to an upcoming assignment and success criteria was established and so the reading was relevant and more meaningful. Also already having a personal interest in attachment reinforced its relevance. Collaborative tasks during seminars using pre-task readings have generated in depth discussions, both in-group work and as a whole class. Furthermore, group feedback to the class allowed an opportunity to consider peer's views and ideas and to reflect on personal opinions. Throughout the task it became apparent how group discussions and feedback can be limited when only a minority engage and contribute, this is an issue Jaques and Salmon (2007) identify as common in group work and recommend delegating roles and setting out expectations beforehand to help ensure full participation. In using the self-evaluation entitled 'How well do I contribute to seminars and groups' I was able to consider and revise my contribution and identify areas that could be improved (Cottrell, 2013, p. 269).

Also, personal knowledge and understanding of attachment were extended as in considering examples from other cultures and listening to peers views helped inform and examine my own. Following the session, more research was conducted to satisfy personal interest. According to Burns and Sinfield (2012), reviewing teaching and learning in this way develops autonomy over personal development and actively encourages self-assessment.

Teaching and learning

According to Cottrell (2013), formal learning such as lectures can be difficult for students to follow, understand and maintain concentration. Moreover, notes can hold little relevance when referring back if the content was not fully understood. As asking questions and active participation is not always a feature of the traditional lecture style in higher education this can exacerbate any issues further. On the other hand, informal learning such as seminars offers students a more interactive approach to learning through formative assessment opportunities including group work, questioning and peer assessment (Cottrell, 2013). Formative assessment during seminars has allowed many opportunities for self-assessment and self-evaluation. Lecturers have shared learning criteria, asked effective questions (allowing processing time) and engaged learners in feedback using tacit knowledge. In doing so, student's progress can be monitored and then steered toward their personal goals, this, in turn, can help close the gap between where the student is and their desired end goal (Clark, 2012). Schunk and Zimmerman (2012) suggest that lecturers and seminar content can inspire students or have the potential to have the opposite effect. Moreover for students to develop or continue to be intrinsically motivated in their learning lecturers need to support and be mindful of student's independence, abilities and relevance of tasks.

Personally, seminars have presented as an opportunity to fully engage in learning and tasks as they allow a topic to be opened up for exploration and for views to be expressed and considered. When personally faced with a new module prior study has always been conducted, more so in year two and three, to gain a better understanding of a concept before starting. On

reflection, this has developed knowledge, confidence, motivation and better engagement during class. For Dweck (2012) students with a fixed mindset may disengage with a new topic if deemed difficult or uninteresting, while students with a growth mindset would look for alternative strategies to understand and grasp a new idea. Wiliam (2017) argues that a growth mindset is also important for teachers as it allows good teaching to become even better. Moreover, a teacher's mindset can have a significant impact on their students.

Assessments

Completing assignments such as essays, presentations, portfolios and exams over the last three years has always left a big sense of relief. Often working on assignments up until the deadline to improve work (sometimes due to procrastination) there has always been lingering afterthoughts of whether enough effort had been given. Tefula (2014) suggests that in addressing the reasons behind procrastination early on changes can be made to motivate students and make the study more manageable. When the results were made available a feeling of trepidation ensued and at times the results have not been what I hoped for. In these instances, perseverance and motivation was the driver to do better next time. Although the final grade were always sought first, the most significant aspect of receiving assignments back has been the written feedback attached and the immediate opportunities offered to meet with the lecturer to discuss work further. These are opportunities I have come to discover are not to be missed and so have always attended and engaged, aimed to ask relevant questions and so build on current knowledge and understanding. Which in turn, has informed self-assessment and self-evaluation. Feedback on learning can be module specific and focus on positive and negative aspects of a piece of work, although, feedback also needs to also feed forward into future modules (Evans, 2013). When it comes to receiving feedback Smale and Fowlie (2015) suggests that students should first and foremost endeavour to take full advantage of every opportunity offered. Secondly, look beyond the grade afforded and (depending on whether the feedback is in writing or verbal) read or listen to comments, ask

questions and take notes. William (2012), argues that students rely too heavily on their grades to measure success and fail to acknowledge corresponding feedback that could prove to be vital in supporting current and future knowledge and understanding and how to improve. To better support learners in achieving their goals for Schunk and Zimmerman (2012) it is important that feedback is purposeful, relevant and timely. Ultimately, students must take responsibility for their work and be respectful of the time and effort involved on the lecturer's part. By taking an active role in the feedback process student's knowledge and understanding is enhanced and they can plan informed next steps to make future progress (Smale and Fowlie, 2015).

Conclusion

Reflecting on my learning journey through higher education the importance of engaging in self-assessment and self-evaluation in developing as an effective learner has become clear. While the first few months of university life proved to be a steep learning curve, my experiences helped shape the learner I have become; motivated, more confident and determined to reach my end goal. I have not been able to improve my time management significantly, in fact this undoubtedly remains an area for further development. However, concerning developing as an effective learner, I believe I have made great strides in now realising how important self-assessment and evaluation have been in my learning journey and how feedback has informed these principles. I have also taken every opportunity to attend, participate and engage in modules and have read, listened to and reflected on feedback. All of which have informed learning and future progression into work as an educational professional.

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